Mills Blue Rhythm Band [Blue Rhythm Band]

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Big band. It was formed in 1930 in New York as the Blue Rhythm Band by the drummer Willie Lynch. During the same year it was known for a time as the Cocoanut Grove Orchestra and it accompanied Louis Armstrong on several recordings. When Irving Mills joined as manager in 1931 it became the Mills Blue Rhythm Band, although on early recordings it appears under a variety of titles, including Mills Music Masters and Blue Rhythm Boys. When Lynch left the band (1931) Baron Lee was chosen to act as leader (1932), and he was followed for a brief period by the trumpeter Eddie Mallory. Lucky Millinder assumed leadership in 1934 (see illustration), and by 1937 the group was performing as Lucky Millinder and his Orchestra; it disbanded in 1938. Among the band's principal members were Wardell Jones, Shelton Hemphill, and Ed Anderson (trumpet), Harry White (trombone), Crawford Wethington (clarinet and alto and baritone saxophone), Ted and Cass McCord (clarinet and tenor saxophone), Edgar Hayes (piano), and Hayes Alvis (double bass). J. C. Higginbotham and Henry "Red" Allen joined in 1934, and the group later included Tab Smith, Charlie Shavers, Harry Edison, Billy Kyle, Wilbur De Paris, Danny Barker, and Frankie Newton. It was most creative and successful in 1931–2, when its arrangements were written by White, Edgar Hayes, and Nat Leslie, and again in 1935–6, when Billy Kyle, Hayes, Alex Hill, and Smith were the principal arrangers. Although Mills originally used the group to substitute for Cab Calloway's and Duke Ellington's orchestras (which he also managed), it developed into an important band, and its best performances showed much originality and sound musicianship. The band made an eponymous short film (1933).

Selected recordings

Moanin' (1931, Bruns. 6156)
Blue Rhythm/Blue Flame (1931, Bruns. 6143)
Futuristic Jungleism (1931, Ban. 32240)
Rhythm Spasm (1932, Mlt. 12418)
White Lightning (1932, Mlt. 12414)
Wild Waves (1932, Ban. 32493)
Back Beats/Spitfire (1935, Col. 3020D)
Ride, Red, Ride (1935, Col. 3087D)
Harlem Heat (1935, Col. 3071D)

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Balloonacy/Barrel House (1936, Col. 3156D)
Big John Special/Callin' your Bluff (1936, Col. 3162D)
Algiers Stomp (1936, Col. 3158D)
Jammin' for the Jackpot (1937, Var. 634)

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